

**Kevin Luepke**, Natural Resource Specialist, Natural Resources Branch (NRB), Fort McCoy; **Jessup Weichert**, Threatened and Endangered Species Biologist, NRB, Fort McCoy **Rikki Ratsch**, Colorado State University, serving Fort McCoy Wildlife Dept; **Bob Micheel**, Director , **Ben Anderson**, Soil and Water Technician, Monroe County Land Conservation; **Richard Meyer** Tomah Tsp ; **Norb Brown**, Angelo Tsp; **Clint Gillman**, DNR Service Forester, **Matt Modjeski**, Conservation Warden, Tomah Ranger Station; **Michelle Komiskey** -District Conservationist, USDA NRCS. **Mic Armstrong** Soil Conservation Technician and Scribe.

**Howard Garves**, **Skip Frazee**, **Ben Johnston**, **Mark Pfof**, **Mary Hubbard**, and **Steve Natchowicz** sent apologies. **Josh Benes** sent a note that he no longer works for Golden Sands-removed from MCISWG email contacts. **Randy Poellma** sent an email update which we detail later in the meeting.

#### **New Faces.:**

**Matt Modjeski**, Conservation Warden, not really a new face but haven't seen him for a couple of years, (Covid). Matt covers all of Monroe Co. except the NE.

**Clint Gillman**, DNR Service Forester, Great to have Clint's insights and knowledge shared with the group! Welcome!

**Norb Brown**, Angelo Township; Norb has property bordering Fort McCoy off 21, Lots of spotted Knapweed, but perhaps the biological control program being implemented on Fort spreads into his as bugs know no borders? Norb has an MFL plan and is also working with Mark Pfof on a wetland area.

**Richard Meyer** Tomah Township. We visited Richard's Barberry patch on Holiday Road, in January a few years ago. It was about 20 below and we did not spend long there but were in awe of the scale of the Barberry infestation. We lost touch after the DNR forester at that time left the area. We have reconnected (Mic drive by) and Richard is interested in the Monroe County program to get some help fighting the prickly invader.

**John Sullivan**, Outdoor Educational Coordinator, School District of West Salem; Gracious host for our meeting and star of the morning Field trip, John's family also owns land in the township of New Lyme and hopes to join us in future MCISWG meetings.

**Ben Anderson**, the new Soils and Water Technician for Land Conservation in Monroe Co. introduced himself at our last virtual meeting, but now in the flesh! He completes a great team at the Sparta Conservation Field Office.

**Agenda Additions.** None

**Report on Field Trip/Pre-meeting-** **John Sullivan** introduced a nice sized group of landowners and agency partners to the Education Center of the West Salem School Forest and its history.

In 1958 Fort McCoy offered to donate 165 Acres to any local school that wanted it if they agreed to make one improvement a year every year for 20 years. West Salem said yes. Why not Sparta? We don't know, but John remembers the early days as he would "sneak" in during shows at the

neighboring outdoor movie theater. The Ag teacher in West Salem at the time was Norm Rowe, he took the bull by the horns, even purchasing a sawmill and the lodge was built. The interstate was constructed so fire lanes were added to the south and west, they were already being maintained on the north and east boundaries with Fort McCoy. A phone line was brought in. In 1978 the property transfer was finalized for \$1.00. An April referendum is in the works to try to get funding for more improvements such as an outdoor pavilion.

The Outdoor Education Center (OEC) has had its ups and downs. It is a venue for teachers of Science, Geography, Social Studies, Native American Studies and more. The Center can bring a different learning experience to the students. Minds work differently in an outdoor setting, even kids with bad reputations become involved. 4K through 8<sup>th</sup> grade come at least 2 times per year. They host other events too.

A bonus after the outdoor classes of the OEC is that John Gomez the neighbor allows groups to fish bass and bluegills out of his pond, there is a pile of cane poles at the center for the purpose as well as supplies to conduct pond studies. Kids love to have mud in their hands looking at crustaceans such as caddis larvae.

John led our group from the MCISWG out around the “Magic Springs trail”. A board walk gets us across the rare sedge meadow, then we follow a trail which is slowly being improved so that eventually it will be handicapped accessible. Some of our group were not fully prepared for the puddles and I am told that a participant left socks to dry on the car after the event, then in the car until one day the kids refused to drive with Mom anymore because of the killer odor. Those socks finally located in the trunk, ended up in a gas station trash can! We all did experience the grandeur of 150-year-old white pines and a rare grove of yellow birch with a stream popping in and out, constantly underneath the root systems. There are several stops where students are introduced to a very unique set of natural phenomena.

The plan is to open the trails to the public by moving the entrance gate and providing a parking spot. It will not be groomed for cross-country skis but will be open for walking and snowshoeing.

There are some invasive plants around the property, 2 kinds of buckthorn and honeysuckle were the only woodies we have noticed. Garlic mustard is spreading. **Luepke and Armstrong** mapped, and hand pulled the worst patches on our reconnoiter a few weeks ago. **Armstrong** repeated the black oak trail prior to the meeting to remap the GM as the GPS point did not come in on the original walk, He found a new population near the Center, mapped, pulled and bagged the plants which were loaded with seed heads.

**Last Meeting Recap.** Luepke requested that, as all had read the version emailed them, the Minutes of the May 13<sup>th</sup> Teams meeting could be approved (all agreed). Find them at: <https://www.co.monroe.wi.us/departments/land-conservation/invasive-species-workgroup>.

## Action Updates

**Boot brushes and signage: Armstrong.** We have received a box full (20) of the small standalone Play Clean Go signs, as well as 150 boot brushes to hang on a chain or use for giveaways at meetings. We also received two of the larger podium style signs with a proper boot brush to be mounted on 4x4's. We discussed the fact that there was no identification on any of them associating with MCISWG. Micheel will try to get a barcode readable sticker of some kind for the signs and perhaps our logo/phone # on the brushes.

**Farmers Market: Armstrong** has been helping **Joey Esterline** with this form of extension. He makes "posters" with pockets for handouts. They sit on a folding chair on a cork board and most weeks we can find a spot to leave it between the vendors for the duration of the market. He brought along a couple for display at the OEC.

**Gravel Fill Certification: Luepke** updated that the timing still isn't right to invite the Gerkes and other vendors to a future MCISWG meeting to meet our group and discuss the program. A letter is being drafted for the group to proof. The Wisconsin Crop Improvement Assn would be the administrator for a \$100.00 fee. No other counties in WI have initiated anything.

**Golden Sands AIS proposal Micheel** said the Golden Sands AIS agreement would be inked (in October?)

**Monroe County Cost share Applications for Private Land Invasive Species Management: Micheel:** \$12-1800.00 available per year, capped at \$600.00  
**Project 2021: Brecheisen, Leis, Hubbard,** all in stages of approval. **Taynor** and **Richard Meyer** will need walkovers. **Mickelson** continues to track the program and asked the Inspection Committee ensure landowners have a written proposal, maps clearly delineating the project and the inspectors provide good photos both before and after.

**Poelma (email communication) is still waiting for a new map to ground truth the Arena project.**

**Display Printing Update Komiskey.** Still no event planned, so the photo of the oak savannah on one side and the infested woods on the other still needs work on getting photos to add on (using tape) to create custom displays.

**Prairie garden Armstrong:** Joey continues to manage the area for weeds, she is planning on buying some grass specific herbicide instead of the little spray bottles we have been using. Split rail fence in process. Future plans involve one of the small PlayCleanGo signs with hand brush on a chain and hopefully a Leopold Bench for boot scratchers to sit on. (Scout project-anyone??).

**Fort McCoy updates Luepke** Crews are transitioning from spraying to hand pulling of Spotted Knapweed due to phenology, Black locust and other woody (glossy, common buckthorn, honeysuckle), foliar treatments are being planned for the near future, Off post treatments were coordinated and conducted by COVIA on Poison Hemlock in Greenfield Township. Garlic Mustard and Japanese Knotweed being treated in Adrian Township. **Luepke** answered a question about oak wilt explaining that crews girdle trees bordering the infestation then run a 6' vibratory plow around the whole area. They conduct aerial surveys via helicopter annually looking for new pockets.

**Phragmites Tomah sites Komiskey**-the paperwork is ever more complicated. Recommend waiting for assistance from Golden Sands AIS this fall.

**Purple Loosestrife mass rearing tent. Armstrong** lamented that the 4H group that worked the tent in 2019 has since disbanded and despite efforts through the 4 H leader and organizers no other club has stepped forward. The 12x12' steel frame is still set up on Avon Road in the middle of some Purple Loosestrife. The old tent was cleaned up and is in storage (**Armstrong's** Garage). We may still have a brand-new cover available in Madison, or we could patch up the old one again. Loose strife guru Bryce **Richardson** would be available to assist as would **Armstrong. Luepke** thought there was still a possibility of Boy Scouts connected to McCoy families taking it on.

**Garlic Mustard Pull. Armstrong** was at the Saturday June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021 Annual Garlic Mustard Harvest along the Elroy Sparta Trail (EST)- section from CTH T (west of Norwalk) to the Summit Ridge Tunnel (#3). It was a hot muggy day, a group of 5 got most of it pulled and bagged for later pick up and a couple of them went back later in the week to finish it out.

**Cheat Grass a sneaky problem on the rise. Anderson** has seen cheat grass (Downy Brome) in the west and noticed some occurrences in Monroe County when he got here. It is a grass that was introduced, probably by accident, but has huge ramifications in fire prone areas. It matures early and forms a thick, highly combustible, cover complicating wildfire management. It also has negative impacts on pasture and range productivity. There are a couple of patches in the blacktop/concrete islands at the top of the on ramp from Hwy 16 to the interstate. Ben thought we would be aware of the infestation by the library in downtown Sparta (old law office parking lot). **Armstrong** confessed that he does his annual invasive show and tell just yards away at the Farmers Market and did not know to tell people about Cheat Grass. Next Year! (P.S. Have not seen the library expansion plans but it may be in that area).

Could not find a good cheatgrass handout before the meeting but has since found this one from Alberta.

[https://abinvasives.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/N\\_FS-DownyBrome.pdf](https://abinvasives.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/N_FS-DownyBrome.pdf)

**Anderson's** concern is that on the drier soils in the northern part of the county, often already infested with Spotted Knapweed, Cheat Grass could become a big problem. It is also competing with short grass prairies in Jackson County. However, in soils capable of growing lush, cool season grass cover it will probably be outcompeted.

**Updates from the front line**

**Gillman** shared some handouts for the upcoming “Classes for Woodland Owners” in August and September. <https://woodlandinfo.org/current-events/>

**Komiskey** has a large oak tree infested with caterpillars. Turns out it is Gypsy Moth. They have contacted DATCP but haven't heard back. Here is the page explaining status of the program <https://gypsymoth.wi.gov/> There is a series of things a homeowner can do to help infested trees, but not sure about what equipment might work to coat the tree (and egg masses) in horticultural Oil. **Armstrong** thought there might be a fogger that would work. **Komiskey** researching.

**Black Locust on Hwy 71 in Little Falls.** **Armstrong** received a call from a landowner, Cindy Liebl, on the corner of 27/71 towards Cataract, concerned about the black locust spreading along the road and now on her property. Worried about damage/danger from the thorns. Said the highway department used to mow it but now it was 8' tall. A quick email to David Ohnstad resulted in staff from the Monroe County Highway Department cutting and treating locust along the right of Way as well as the adjacent population. I am not sure if they had the Black Locust already scheduled for treatment, but it sure made Cindy Liebl's day!

This led to a brief discussion about collaborations with the Monroe County Highway Department. (MCHD). **Armstrong** hoped that future efforts could include Teasel and Japanese Knotweed. The long-awaited mapping project contracted by MCHD is still on hold due to COVID/staffing problems, but we are told it should resume in 2022. **Luepke** added that some County Highway Departments are incorporating growth regulators into a spring herbicide mix and having great success managing broadleaved weeds including wild parsnip, in some cases virtually eliminating roadside mowing. MCHD is aware of the practices, not sure what stage they are at.

**Email from Randy Poellma** Environmental Sciences Program Manager, Ho-Chunk Nation Division of Env. Health

Hope you've been doing well. I'm sorry but I have other work commitments that take priority so will not make the meeting. You could provide an update on our activities if you like but unfortunately our field work is not focused on Monroe Co. at this time. Here is what our program has been working on:

- Shawano Co.: woody spot treatments on 700 acres under GLRI funding. Continues to be more or less unlimited GLRI funding for our work, new grant just awarded so will resume woody treatments winter 2022 followed by herbaceous next growing season and then another series of woody treatments in winter 2023.
- Sauk Co.: former ammo plant land, primarily woody spot treatments on 600 acres but some thistle treatment as well. Some mowing work to establish new prairie plantings and treat road ROW in select areas. We are able to do a lot of invasives management on this parcel using prescribed fire and then bounce around to different areas employing chemical and mechanical methods.
- Jackson Co.: New grant award just processed to resume spot treatments on roughly 1,100 acres around Black River Falls. Last treatments on those parcels occurred winter 2020.

- Vernon Co.: This will be of more interest to the group...New grant award just processed to inventory populations and prioritize treatments on the 1,200 acres of trust land in the KVR, this will include populations straddling HCN/state land. We have a prioritization matrix that weighs multiple considerations such as treatability, cost, ecological context etc...the “most bang for the buck approach” ecologically speaking. I hope to initiate some treatments on priority populations, but this grant includes the work in both Vernon and Jackson Counties. I have submitted an End of Year funding request specific to KVR treatments to capture any BIA funding that is laying around come the end of September.

Majority of this is continuing to work in areas that we have previously inventoried and treated but it will be nice to expand our efforts into the KVR and support Ben’s work.

**Future Field Days.** Still not able to start planning due to a seemingly worsening Covid situation. Future outdoor meetings are a possibility, and a suggestion of the Cataract Sportsman’s club was countered with the fact we recently held a Field Day at the Little Falls Town Hall. Micheel thought we should try new areas of the county first. The Brookwood School Forest might be a good one.

**Sharon Folcey** our representative on the Towns Association recently passed away. She will be missed.

<https://www.schanhoferfh.com/obituary/Sharon-Folcey>

**Next Meeting: Thursday September 16<sup>th</sup>** (1 to 3 p.m.) Location TBA

In Person?? Either way, will have options to do video conference/phone in.

Field trip (Pre meeting 11a.m-12?) Brookwood School Forest??

